

I claim:

1. A method allowing a remote party to research the in-tank fuel levels of the bulk fuel tanks of a distributed population of retail fuel stations, comprising the steps of:

configuring a distributed population of retail fuel stations as data-origin parties of in-tank fuel level data from the on-premise bulk fuel tanks as obtained from controllers of automated tank gauges (ATG's) as well as being an origin of data obtained from some other on-premise device or sensor;

providing each data-origin party with an on-premise data communicator that is associated with and polls at least one on-premise ATG controller and at least one on-premise some other device or sensor for data thereof, and pre-programmed with a cyclic schedule and stores locally at least one cycle's worth of such polled data;

providing a communications network having intermediate storage and a given message-switching message-propagating technology;

providing a data-destination party with a message-switching address;

each data communicator cyclically propagating a data message over the communications network by means of the given message-switching message-propagating technology and as addressed to the data-destination party, which data message contains a historical record of the polled data of at least the current cycle and as polled from the associated at least one on-premise ATG controller and at least one on-premise some other device or sensor.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein any given associated at least one other device or sensor is corresponded with a non-petroleum metric of the retail fuel station.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the non-petroleum metric comprises any of proof-of-sales records, cooler temperature, a cathodic protection system, a door alarm, or ambient temperature.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein any given associated at least one other device or sensor is corresponded with either proof-of-sales or dispenser records which thereby affords reconciliation with fuel depletion metrics obtained from the data of the respectively associated at least one ATG controller.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the communications network comprises the Internet global computer network.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the message-switching message-propagating technology comprises at least SMTP e-mail technology or a competitive analog thereto.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the intermediate storage comprises at least the data storage devices of ISP's.

8. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of the data communicators of the data-origin parties receiving communications across the communications network from a party authorized to do so containing instructions to change message-propagating scheduling.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the data-destination party comprises any of a wholesaler, a dispatcher, an equipment vendor or a remote business office of the management over at least one retail fuel station.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein each data communicator is pre-programmed with programming regarding a schedule to follow in matters of when to propagate data to the data destination party(ies).

11. The method of claim 1 wherein parties cyclically contact a selected time server over the communications network in order to coordinate time accurately among themselves.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein data communicator is provides with a local storage device having sufficient capacitance to save multiple cycle's worth of historic polled data.